

MASTERTON—WOODVILLE.

Honourable members are aware that the extension of this line has been very recently opened as far as Mauriceville. A further section of about four miles will be opened in October next.

It is proposed to let a contract to extend this line as far as Eketahuna, so soon as Parliament has sanctioned the expenditure. The large amount of settlement taking place along the route of this line between Mauriceville and Pahiatua points to the desirableness of continuing the construction of this line, and, if funds are provided, this will be done.

FOXTON—NEW PLYMOUTH.

The branch line from New Plymouth to the breakwater has recently been opened, and, with some slight modifications in the rates, is sure to prove of great benefit to the district.

PICTON—AWATERE RAILWAY.

An addition of 100ft. in length has been made to the Picton Wharf.

The formation of railway is completed, except bridges, for $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the southward of Blenheim, and a further length of $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles is in progress. Although the contractor was urged some considerable time since to expedite the work it is still going on very slowly, and it is calculated that it will take at least twelve months more to finish it.

The amount which I propose to ask the House for this year will provide for a further formation contract of about 3 miles, and also for the bridges required in the first 3 miles from Blenheim.

EAST AND WEST COAST AND NELSON (MIDLAND) RAILWAY.

The subject of the construction of this railway has been so fully discussed in this House that it is unnecessary for me to make much reference to it to-night. My opinion as to the desirableness of its construction is well known; and ever since the Public Works scheme brought forward by my honourable colleague Sir Julius Vogel in 1870, I have taken every opportunity that has offered itself to promote railway connection between the East and West Coast of the Middle Island.

It was suggested to me immediately after last session that fuller and more reliable information as to the resources and nature of the country should be procured, in the event of anything occurring to cause the contract, now happily settled, to fall through.

I therefore instructed Mr. Blair, the Assistant Engineer-in-Chief, to visit the district and report more fully than had previously been done, and to collect such information as would probably be required by Parliament in case the Government had to ask for a vote for the construction of this line.

The report will be very useful, and the maps attached to it will also, I am sure, be very interesting to honourable members, and of the greatest service for future reference.

The first of these maps shows the present settlement of the country, the second the description of the land, the third the description and area of the forests, and the fourth the localities of the several descriptions of minerals as far as at present known throughout the district. On all of these maps the railways constructed, in course of construction, and the lines now under contract, as well as those lines which the Government considers will be required in the northern part of the Middle Island, are clearly marked.

This report, with maps, will be printed and laid on the table of the House in a day or two.

I am now justified in expressing the hope that, before the House meets next year, the works on this great railway will be fairly started.

In connection with the railway it is proposed to construct branches from the Inangahua Junction to Westport, and from Tophouse to Blenheim; but as neither of these lines have as yet been surveyed for contract it would not be possible to do any work upon them within the present financial year, and I therefore only